

[In the Hospital]

Beliefs & Customs Folk Stuff 16

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Joseph Vogel

ADDRESS

DATE March 28, 1939

SUBJECT In the Hospital

1. Date and time of interview

March 28, 1939 5 o'clock. P.M.

2. Place of interview

Kings County Hospital

3. Name and address of informant

Resident Physician (Request made not to use name.)

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4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Joseph Vogel

ADDRESS

DATE March 28, 1939

SUBJECT In the Hospital

GETTING USED TO SICK PEOPLE

Some people have the impression that we who work in a hospital get a distorted view of life. You know how the visitor feels when he comes to the hospital; he's astonished at finding so many sick people around him; he never stopped to think there is so much sickness in the world. That leads him to think that perhaps we doctors are also astonished, when we go out of the hospital, at finding so many healthy people about. The truth is we don't think about it. We no more lose our sense of proportion than do members of other professions. For example, the average person may think that an undertaker has a morbid

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outlook on life. As a matter of fact the undertaker, no less than the shoe salesman, will enjoy his game of bridge in the evening, laugh at the same jokes, and act like any ordinary person when he gets through with the day's work.

However, you might make this distinction. The doctor who is new to his job naturally doesn't take it quite so casually. The interne, 2 when he rides the subway, is likely to examine faces closely and decide what ails this one and that one. He is likely, when he goes to bed at night, to worry about his cases, to analyze them again — and he hopes to effect miraculous cures. There again the same attitude would apply to anyone new to his job, when everything makes a much stronger impression on the mind.

HOCUS POCUS IN MEDICINE

There's plenty hocus pocus in our profession. Some of it serves a good purpose. That's what's known as the bedside manner. It serves a psychological purpose. There's a visiting doctor comes to the hospital who knows as little about medicine as ... we all think he's dumb. But you should see the manners he puts on. You would think he was the country's greatest doctor. He goes up to a patient, takes her hand and pats it, and says, "Fine! You're improving wonderfully! You look fine today!" And sure enough you can see the patient actually improving. The temperature goes down, color comes into the cheeks, the eyes shine. There's an actual improvement.

Now every doctor can't do that. That's why some women go around praising their doctors, who may be terrible, to the skies, and other women go around cursing their doctors, who may be very good, to hell.

There's other kinds of hocus pocus which doesn't serve any good purpose. Doctors aren't supposed to advertise, but some of them get lots of publicity by other ways. There's the doctor who got Lindbergh to make a mechanical heart. Now any glassblower could make him a glass heart according to directions, but of course when you collaborate with Lindbergh you get front-page publicity. Then there are doctors who make sensational 3

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statements, as, for instance, you can't tell a woman's health by looking at her because women paint their cheeks and fingernails. Now, any doctor knows that all you have to do is examine a woman's eyes, by pulling down the skin on the bottom of the eye, and you can get as good an idea of her blood condition as from the color of cheeks and fingernails.

Medicine lends itself more easily to quackery than other professions. Announce the discovery of a new style of shoe and very few people will get excited about it. But announce the discovery of a new style of shoe that will cure weak ankles, straighten out the toes, remove bunions, and prolong the span of life, and the excitement will amount almost to panic.

VISITING HOURS

Visiting hours at the hospital may look like a holiday to some people, but we doctors hate it. The nurses hate it. A lot of the patients hate it too. Visitors crowd around the beds, they get the patients excited, they get in everybody's way, and what's the result? The patient is always worse for it. Their temperature goes up from one to three degrees. It's not so good for the health. But what can you do? Try telling a visitor that his visit instead of being a blessing to the patient is doing harm, and you'll get the hair torn out of your head.